

SOCIAL ACTION

MARCH 1952

CHRISTIANS

OF THE

SCHEDULED CASTES

As. 6

DIAN INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL ORDER

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SOCIAL ACTION

VOL. 1 No. 12

MARCH 1952

WHO ARE THE UNTOUCHABLES ?

A. FONSECA 377

CONSTITUTIONAL POSITION OF THE
BACKWARD CLASSES

C. C. CLUMP 383

GANDHIJI'S LEAD

A. LALLEMAND 390

HARIJANS AT SCHOOL

L. RAYMOND 398

Who are the Untouchables

'Unclean, Unclean' was the familiar cry of the leper in the days when Christ walked the earth in Palestine, a cry at which people would panic in fear and disgust. The lepers were the outcastes of Jewish society. They lived their lonely lives in caves and huts and were only allowed to approach the towns or villages within certain fixed limits for food and drink. This was the only effective way the Jews could discover to prevent the dread disease from spreading. To the Jews, leprosy left its stigma not only on the body but also on the soul.

Unlike Palestine, lepers in India are free to roam about wherever they please. But in our country there is a type of social leprosy the effects of which can bear comparison with all the harsh physical disabilities suffered by the lepers of old. The caste system is familiar at least in name to people all the world over. But like practically everything that is peculiarly indigenous, the caste system is extremely complex in its working. Its origins are hid in the dark womb

of a past that spans thousands of years. And although the beginnings of the system may have been very simple, it has evolved into an elaborate cast-iron structure that retains much of its rigidity down to our days of democratic equality.

Our Purpose

Social Action is not interested in the caste system from the purely academic point of view. The caste system has social repercussions of great importance. It has produced the outcastes of India who number over 50 million today. They have been known for centuries as the Untouchables. Any kind of contact with them, even a look in certain cases, would mean interior pollution or defilement for caste people. It is related in the Vedas that two Brahmin girls were playing, when they happened to look at a Shudra, and lo! they were defiled. They had to purify themselves by scrupulously fulfilling the minutiae of the complicated rites of purification before they could recover their former status as caste members. This is by no means an exceptional case. And though the Constitution has abolished Untouchability, caste distinctions and prejudices are fiercely alive to this day. Only a short while ago, some Harijans — Gandhiji's endearing euphemism for the Untouchables — and a Harijan Social worker were assaulted and beaten up by caste people in Madurai for entering a tea-stall reserved for high-caste patronage.

But to understand the issue in its full context, the present article will deal with the social, religious, and economic position of the Untouchables *vis-a-vis* Hindu Society.

What is Caste?

According to the Purusha Sukta, there were originally four great divisions in the Indo-Aryan Society. The term used to describe each of them is not caste, but 'Varna' or colour, which is a detail of great significance as it throws light on one stage in the evolution of the Caste System. Differences of colour seem to account for social divisions.

The four Varnas were the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas, and the Shudras. Only the first three are considered to be caste people. Only they are allowed to wear the sacred thread which throws open to them the consolations of Hindu ritual and the privileges of Hindu social life. The Shudras are the Untouchables or the Outcasts. According to the Hindu traditions, the Shudras are to take the last place in the social order ; they are to be treated with contempt. No Shudra may educate himself, nor may he acquire property. His life is of little value ; it is his duty to serve the higher castes. The higher castes are prohibited from marrying Shudras.

Considered as a social structure, however, the caste system is something organic to Hindu society. During the course of her history, India has been invaded on several occasions, and the invaders have been absorbed into the existing social order. Through the mechanism of caste, they have been able to live on peaceful terms with their neighbours, while both preserving their distinctive traditions and sharing in the common life of the old community.

The caste system revolves around two important restrictions — food and marriage. Broadly speaking, a person of one caste may not dine with those of another, nor may he marry a woman of another caste. Even within his own caste, he cannot marry whomever he pleases ; there is a strict limit to his choice of brides. According to the *Sapinda* rule, marriage is not permitted between any two persons who possess a common ancestor, within a certain number of degrees on the father's side and a smaller number of degrees on the mother's side. This rule is enforced very strictly.

How did these restrictions arise ? Though mainly social in origin, they might also be due to ancient religious beliefs in taboo. A man had to be careful of the food he ate. Certain foods were taboo because they were supposed to injure the eater not physically, but spiritually. They might pollute a man for the evil passed into him with his food, and would

spread to the whole caste by contact with him. In the light of this belief, no man could dine with those of another community. He must dine only with those of his own for fear of pollution. The interdiction on marriage except with members of one's caste, followed logically. For how could a man eat the food cooked by his wife, if she were of a caste other than his own ?

It is quite common to see caste people carrying their cooking utensils with them to avoid all danger of pollution. And at railway stations, even drinking water is reserved. Only a brahmin water-carrier may draw water for Brahmins to drink.

There are over 3000 castes in India, for the four original Varnas have split up into any number of subcastes, which rigidly observe the rules of interdining and intermarriage.

Caste and Religion

Though caste owes its origin to race occupation and taboo, the system has been maintained in existence for thousands of years chiefly through religious sanction. The Hindu regards the fulfilment of his caste duties of purificatory rites and ceremonies, as the essential part of his religious obligations. By fulfilling them scrupulously, he acquires merit in the sight of God. Such accumulated merit will enable him to be born in a higher stage of 'release' at his next rebirth, for the liberation from his individuality and absorption into the eternal Brahma is the final purpose of his existence. If the Untouchable has to suffer social and economic disabilities, it is his own fault. He is merely paying the penalty for the sins of a previous life. So long as rebirth is an accepted belief, the situation of the Harijan will remain what it is. But modern ideas of equality and individual rights are making inroads into orthodox practice and most of the Harijans today are conscious of the privileges guaranteed to them by the Constitution, and demand their fulfilment.

Its Social Function

It would be foolish to deny that the caste system possesses no advantages. Every Hindu is born into a definite social milieu, his caste, which serves his needs as they arise. His caste is his school, his club, his trade union, his insurance against unemployment, and insecurity. Like the Welfare State, it seeks to satisfy his wants from the cradle to the grave. At the same time it provides him with his status in society. As a member of his caste, the Hindu knows exactly where he stands with his fellow men and how much he may expect from them.

But precisely by reason of its rigidity and its extensive functions the caste tends to absorb the individual. As a social unit the caste lays down rules and regulations and practically makes all public decisions for the individual. A few persons often control the entire activity of the caste and its members. There is no escape from this tyranny except the death of the persons in power.

The great sin of the caste system however is that it has been misused for centuries to exploit the Outcast. It is on this score above all that the caste system stands most open to condemnation.

Untouchability

One of the tragic legacies of the caste system is Untouchability. In the villages of India, the Untouchables live in a separate section of the village, practically on its outskirts. Their share in the division of labour is confined to the menial tasks, like cleaning up the garbage in the village, sweeping the roads, washing dirty clothes, handling corpses, working on the skins of dead animals, or as day labourers in the fields. For all these tasks they are paid a miserable pittance.

Their Disabilities

Though the vast majority of them are Hindus by religion, they are debarred from entering Hindu temples.

Neither could they use the Hindu burning grounds, nor have access to Hindu monasteries. They were also the victims of civic disabilities of various kinds. In certain parts of the country, Harijans were forbidden the use of public roads. The village well is generally out of bounds for them. In South India there are records quoted in the Census of 1931 that recount more personal restrictions imposed on Harijans by the higher castes. They should not wear their clothes below the knees, they were not to wear gold or silver ornaments, nor use brass pots, but only pots of clay. At their weddings the bridegroom should not come riding on a horse as is the practice among the higher castes. Even their huts could not be built of permanent material. In the larger villages and the smaller towns, they were liable to assault if they dared enter a tea stall or a barber's shop.

The situation today has not improved so very much despite four years of independence. Though Untouchability has been legally abolished by the Constitution the Untouchables are still made to feel their inferior status. This is not surprising. No social prejudice that has entered so deeply into the minds of people can be made to disappear over night with a stroke of the pen. The equality that is guaranteed to the Harijan by the Constitution is a great step forward. But political equality must be founded on economic equality if it is to mean anything.

That this is true needs no elaborate proof. Dr. Ambedkar the leader of the Harijans or the Scheduled Classes as they are euphemistically described by the Constitution, is a living example of the difference education and a good salary can make in the life of an Untouchable. Dr. Ambedkar is not the only example. But there is still much leeway to be made.

To help eradicate the evil effects of the caste system, the Constitution has conferred certain educational and economic benefits on the backward classes. This is a magnanimous gesture on the part of India's legislators. Untouchables who are converts to Christianity however are being

deprived of these benefits, which they need as sorely as Hindu Untouchables. Why should such discrimination exist? This is the question to which we dedicate this number of *Social Action*.

It should be quite plain that the Indian Institute of Social Order is not tied up with any political party. Its sympathies are as broad as those of the Catholic Church. Its purpose is the attainment and the furtherance of social justice, and it will seek social redress, wherever injustice is practised. A certain section of the Harijans is being discriminated against on purely religious grounds. This is a matter that clamours for publicity and redress.

A. Fonseca.



The Constitutional Position of the Backward Classes

"The test of a successful democracy," says an ancient adage, "is its ability to protect the rights of all its citizens, and harmonize the legitimate rights and interests of its minorities with those of the State". In order to achieve this success, the Indian Constitution, like those of many States established after World War I, embodies a chapter on fundamental human rights. Round these rights the whole structure of the State is built up, so as to assure, as the Preamble of the Constitution states, that "Justice, social, economic and political" will come within the experience of every citizen. Besides this chapter on fundamental rights, the Constitution also enumerates certain directive principles of State policy; while the chapter on fundamental

rights lays down certain things which the State must refrain from doing, the provisions relating to directive principles lay down a constructive plan which the State must endeavour to implement.

These Directive Principles spring from the nature of the Preamble of the Constitution and though not enforceable by law, they are nonetheless fundamental to the common welfare, or the end and purpose of the State : hence, it is the duty of the State to keep these directive principles in view in its legislative and executive activities. Article 39 of the Directive principles requires of the State to secure adequate means of livelihood to all citizens, men and women equally ; "that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as to best serve the common good ; that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment ; that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women ; that the health and strength of the workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused, and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength ; and that childhood and youth are protected against moral and material abandonment".

The social value of both the declaration of fundamental human rights and the directive principles is easily estimated when it is remembered that India is a country in which large sections of the population, known as the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, shows an educational, economic and social standard far below that prevalent among the more advanced sections of the people. While many of the members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes have drifted into towns and cities and there eke out a miserable pittance as a living, mostly by means of manual labour, the bulk of their population, amid very primitive conditions, still dwell in the rural areas and hilly tracts of the Indian Union. To help

the social uplift of these weaker sections of India's population, provision has been made in the Constitution.

Articles 330 to 342 and again, schedules 5 and 6 make it incumbent upon the State to safeguard the rights and interests of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and to ensure their speedy uplift, so that they may make their contribution towards the common welfare. Moreover a special officer appointed by the President will make it his duty to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and other backward classes. This officer is expected to send reports periodically to the President upon the working of these safeguards, and the Constitution provides for the President to lay all such reports before Parliament. It has been also provided that the President may at any time, and shall after ten years from the commencement of the Constitution, appoint a special Commission to report on the administration of the Scheduled areas and the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes. The President also has the power, from time to time, to appoint a Commission to investigate the conditions of the socially and educationally backward classes, to examine the difficulties and obstacles under which they labour, and to make suitable recommendations in the matter. Parliament is to be advised by the President of the action taken by him on receipt of the report of the Commission. The Constitution provides for the establishment of the Tribes Advisory Councils in those States in which such Tribes are found. Such Councils are to advise on such matters as are referred to by the Governor or Ruler. It rests within the powers of the Governor to define the boundaries of different Tribes; but it is left to the President to declare by order, which of those are classed as scheduled areas. All rules and regulations made by the Governor or Ruler must be immediately submitted to the President, and such regulations shall have no effect until the assent of the President has been given. Each year, or as often as required by the Government of India,

the Governor concerned shall report on the scheduled areas in his State.

Thus, the Indian Constitution makes ample provision for the uplift of the backward classes of the country, and the spirit of the Constitution accepts the fact that, so long as a single member of the Indian Union is denied the opportunity of economic, intellectual and moral development, by so much has the whole Constitution failed to realise its end and purpose.

This social uplift, provided by our Constitution, cannot afford to neglect a few fundamental points essential to the betterment of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. In fact, on the realisation of these points depends the success of the plan envisaged in the Constitution. Perhaps, the most important problem which faces the backward classes, whether they dwell in towns or villages, is their all too insufficient means of livelihood. It is a common place that in our cities and towns members of the backward class, for the most part, subsist on a starvation level of wages. This evil brings in its train all the other miseries which characterise the lives of these unfortunate people: they live in hovels devoid of all sanitary facilities and lack the bare necessities of life, food, clothing and shelter. In the rural areas and hilly tracts, these people live in the most primitive conditions: agricultural methods are unknown to them, and many take to hunting, fishing or living on wild roots and tubers of the forests. To fit the backward class workers to urban conditions must needs be a long, patient and difficult task as every social worker knows. Often, physically unfit and unskilled they do not qualify for a wage which a skilled worker may demand, in urban and industrial centres. Much, in fact, still remains to be done to raise the skill of these workers. In the rural areas, training in better methods of cultivation, mixed farming, cottage industries and marketing may help raise the standard of living of these workers. Education is the next important factor essential to any attempt to better the condition of our backward classes.

In order to implement the provisions of the Constitution, Article 17 abolishes the evil of untouchability by making it a criminal offence against the law and the rights relating to equality, and thus prohibiting discrimination in any form in the matter of employment and admission into schools. This, indeed, goes a long way towards giving our Scheduled Castes and Tribes a better opportunity to qualify for better paid posts in the country, and also opens to every child of the backward classes all the educational facilities provided in the Indian Union. In pursuance of this State policy, the Government of the Indian Republic, in 1949-1950 revised the scheme of State scholarships to include the Scheduled Castes, Aborigines and Hill Tribes and other backward classes. Of a sum of Rs. ten lakhs sanctioned for the scheme, Rs. six lakhs were set apart for scholarships to Scheduled Caste students, and Rs. five lakhs for those belonging to the Aboriginal, Hill Tribes and other backward classes with the provision to transfer funds from one head to the other, if necessary candidates belonging to the Indian States and States Union were eligible for scholarships under the revised scheme. In order to administer the scheme, the Government of India appointed a Scheduled Castes and other backward classes scholarship Board with its own chairman and Secretary. It is interesting to note, that in 1949-1950 about 6,000 applications were received for the award of these scholarships. The Board selected 1,178 candidates for scholarships: Scheduled Castes, 647; Aboriginal and Hill Tribes, 148, and other backward classes, 383. Further provision has been made to continue the scheme over a number of years so as to enable these backward classes to obtain the necessary financial help towards their education, and so build them into useful citizens of the Indian Union.

While no one would deny the need of encouraging higher education among our backward classes, as this scholarship scheme does, there is need for special educational facilities for the vast number of those who do not take to higher education. That is to say, educational establishments of a

technical type are essential to produce skilled workers and craftsmen from members of these classes. In fact, unless such institutions are multiplied in all large towns and cities, under employment and poorly paid occupations will be prevalent conditions which obtain among our backward classes. Yet another basic evil, the removal of which is essential to the social uplift of our Scheduled Castes and Tribes, is the evil of exploitation. This exploitation is practised in several ways. The money lender, the business man and the merchant all prey upon the backward classes. It is a common experience, both in towns and villages, to find usurious rates of interest being charged by the unscrupulous money lender; and once in debt the unfortunate victim never goes free! In rural areas the systematic deceit practised upon these people has resulted in large areas of their lands passing into the possession of their exploiters. To put a stop to this evil several State Governments have enacted laws, but this malpractice has merely been driven underground, and such transactions continue to deprive the backward classes, in the rural areas, of their homes and properties. If the evil of debt and the practice of borrowing at exorbitant rates of interest is to be checked at its source, habits of thrift and of economy must enter into the training of our backward classes. When a genuine need for a loan arises, economic conditions should be such, that this need may be satisfied by credit facilities operated by some type of co-operative society. It is useless to pretend that the Law alone is able to deal with this evil, or that the Law alone is an effective protection against the money lender who is found in every village and town. In fact, village co-operative institutions, stores and credit facilities would prove helpful measures to free these people from the grasping clutches of the unscrupulous merchant and money lender.

Schemes of social rehabilitation which aim not merely at feeding, clothing and housing these people, but also at making them useful citizens of the Indian Republic, provide

efficient means for the social betterment of the backward classes. The village Panchayats, though not recommended specifically for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, must necessarily figure in any long term policy for the uplift of these people. Provision for this is made in article 40 of the Indian Constitution which lays down that, "The State shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government".

This incomplete survey of the main fundamental social requisites, so necessary to the uplift of our Scheduled Castes and Tribes, presents some idea of the vast and intricate problem of human re-adjustment involved in any attempt to implement the demands of our Constitution with respect to these peoples. The problem is one of intense interest and tense with great potentialities, and from its solution will spring something beautiful and truly great. While, therefore, it must be admitted that there is a special responsibility on the State to hasten the development of our backward classes, it has to be recognised that the process must inevitably be slow and more harm than good would result from forcing the pace. But this responsibility for the welfare of the backward classes does not rest with the State alone, and is the concern of every single member of the Indian Union. "It is the sign of a healthy polity", writes Cardinal John Newman, "that the misery of the least of its members is reckoned as an injury to the whole community".

C. C. Clump, S.J.



Gandhiji's Lead

Whilst going through the writings of Gandhiji, the greatest Hindu of modern times, research-workers seeking to discover and formulate the quintessence of Hinduism would be puzzled at some of his statements, like 'the central fact of Hinduism is cow protection' (*Young India*, 6-10-1921) or 'Hinduism does not believe in caste' (*Harijan*, 6-3-1937). Would they be satisfied with his explanation that the cow is only a symbol of dumb creation which Hinduism brought up to the level of human life or that *varna* does not mean more than hereditary occupation? In any case they should understand the way of Gandhiji. Gandhiji based his reasoning on his moral sense; it was on that moral sense that he interpreted, explained, admitted or rejected *shastras* and *smritis*. It was on that basis that he denied untouchability is countenanced by Hinduism: "I claim myself to be a representative of *Sanatana Dharma* in every sense of the term that they claim. I base my vehement opposition to untouchability upon the same *shastras* even though I were the solitary one amongst the millions of Hindus; because the same *shastras* tell me that I may not resist the inner call of my inner being. Untouchability as we practise it today has absolutely no warrant whatsoever in the Hindu *shastras*." (Guruvayur Speech in *Harijan* 26-1-1934).

Dr. Ambedkar who had been asked for a statement to be published in the first issue of *Harijan* had written: "The outcaste is a bye-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system. Nothing can help to save the Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of the Hindu faith of this odious and vicious dogma". Gandhiji replied (*Harijan*, 11-2--1933): "I do not believe the caste system, even as distinguished from *varnashrama*, to be an

'odious and vicious dogma'. It has its limitations and its defects, but there is nothing sinful about it, as there is about untouchability, and if it is a bye-product of the caste system it is only in the same sense that an ugly growth is of a body, or weeds of a crop. It is as wrong to destroy caste because of the outcaste as it would be to destroy a body because of an ugly growth in it or a crop because of the weeds. The outcast-ness, in the sense we understand it, has therefore to be destroyed altogether. It is an excess to be removed if the whole system is not to perish. Untouchability is the product, therefore, not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this 'high-and-lowness'. The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true *Varna Dharma*, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other, and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other."

In other writings he is at pains to explain how *varna* 'means predetermination of the choice of man's profession', that 'the only profession after his (man's) heart should be the profession of his fathers', that it 'is the best form of insurance for happiness and for real religious pursuit', that in *Varna Dharma*, 'there is no bar in any shape or form to the highest mental development. The bar altogether normal is against change of hereditary occupation for the sake of bettering one's material condition', etc.; finally "If I had the power, I should declare that we are all Hindus, all of the same *varna*". (*Young India* 24-11-27 and *Harijan*, 4-4-36).

Specialists may be entrusted with the task of discussing Gandhiji's orthodoxy. It is enough for the general public to retain that he held clear cut opinions on the point and that he felt he had a mission to destroy untouchability. Instead of discussing theories, it is more interesting and

more instructive to follow him in the course of what he felt was his mission in life.

From his early childhood, the little Mohandas showed a spirit of non-conformism and a strong fellow-feeling. He associated with a Muslim lad who did him no good and led him astray to smoking, meat-eating and worse. With impish fun, he used to play with a scavenger boy and felt impatient of his mother's injunction to bathe after each such unclean association; though he was not more than twelve years old, he used to answer his mother: "How can that be, when in the Ramayana one who is today regarded as an untouchable took Rama across the Ganges in a boat?"¹

He himself wrote later: "My views on untouchability are not the product of my Western education. I had formed them long before I went to England, and long before I studied the scriptures, and in an atmosphere which was by no means favourable to those views. For I was born in an orthodox Vaishnava family and yet ever since I reached the year of discretion I have firmly held my uncompromising views in the matter, which later comparative study of Hinduism and experience have only confirmed."²

Yet it was especially in South-Africa that his fellow-feeling made him one with untouchables. In England his study of religions had deepened his ideas of tolerance, broadened his outlook and impressed him with the idea and practice of equality he saw all round. In South-Africa Kallenbach, his German friend, and the Catholic Trappist monks had taught him by example the dignity of manual labour and of the least menial service; he readily took after them and at the Tolstoi farm he enforced on his disciples and his wife a routine of work that would have appalled any orthodox Hindus, and that was faithfully observed by the seventy satyagrahis he had gathered from among

¹ *Mahatma*, by D. G. Tendulkar, I, p. 32.

² *Young India*, 7-2-1927.

Hindus, Christians and Parsis. It took all of Kasturbai's loyalty to submit to such constant humiliating tasks and go through that ordeal of her wifely education. Most of the Indians he fought for in South-Africa were indentured labourers recruited from the lower castes and leading a sub-human life in minefields, plantations and factories. He fought for them, he conquered them, he felt one of them.

When he returned to India, his championship of their cause faced much greater obstacles ; they were a minority in the home of orthodoxy, their cause had to be merged into the national struggle, their ignorance and apathy were the despair of their most earnest sympathizers. Without delay he settled down to his tripple task : awaken the sixty million untouchables out of their lethargy, win the favour of the orthodox majority on their behalf, build up the masses, Brahmins and untouchables, Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Parsis, into one non-violent army fighting the same national cause. Painful incidents marked his progress. At Bombay in May 1918 he had gone to a meeting which had been called to promote the cause of the untouchables ; he discovered that no untouchable was present, and rather than soothing his audience with what would have been an academic pleading of their cause, he refused to deliver his address. In his ashram near Ahmedabad he had admitted a family of untouchables ; wealthy Hindus who had helped him so far cut off all financial support, Kasturbai and the other women inmates rebuked him with shrieking conviction ; he remained undisturbed and kept the untouchables. He even adopted the little Lakshmi as his own daughter ; new domestic quarrel, but finally Kasturbai gave in, and accepted to become the mother of the untouchable.

Gandhiji was not vindicating his policy on general humanitarian grounds, but he boldly pleaded his case in terms of Hinduism, for Gandhiji remained a strong advocate of Hinduism till his death. "I do not want to be re-born", he said as quoted by Mr. L. Fischer, "but if I have to be re-born, I should be re-born an untouchable so that I may

share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled against them in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from their miserable condition". Against Brahmins and orthodox pundits, he repeated that untouchability was an excrescence of Hinduism, a cancer which had eaten into the vitals of Hindu society and had to be mercilessly excised. "If it was proved that it is an essential part of Hinduism, I for one would declare myself an open rebel against Hinduism itself" (*Mahatma*, by D. G. Tendulkar, I, p. 205). "Hinduism is passing through a fiery ordeal. It will perish not through individual conversions, not even through mass conversions, but it will perish because of the sinful denial of the so-called *savarna* Hindus of elementary justice to Harijans" (*Harijan*, 21-3-36). As an object-lesson to the nation he took to cleaning lavatories and got his disciples in the ashram to do likewise; nobody at the ashram was untouchable since all had become untouchables. In course of time he grew impatient of appellations like untouchables, pariahs, depressed classes, scheduled castes, etc. He began using the word 'Harijan' (child of God) and later took the word as title for his weekly (1933).

In South-Africa he had fought for the equality of Indians with white men, in India he would fight for the equality of the humblest Indians with Brahmins. "Swaraj is a meaningless term if we desire to keep one-fifth of India under perpetual subjection. . . . Inhuman for ourselves, we may not plead before the Throne for deliverance from the inhumanity of others" (*Young India*, 25-5-1925).

His preaching of equality was realistic. Whenever a place at meetings was reserved for untouchables, he would go and sit among them, and force Brahmins to do likewise if they wanted to interview him. His sense of popular oratory led him to a familiar illustration worth mentioning. He would lift his left hand, spread the five fingers, and then taking finger after finger with his right hand he would explain: "The first finger represents equality for untouchables. The second spinning. The third sobriety. The fourth

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Hindu-Muslim friendship. The fifth equality for women. The hand joins the fingers to the wrist and the wrist is non-violence. The fingers worked by the wrist will free each one of us and India".

In spite of his efforts and popularity, the wrist failed to command the five fingers. Equality for Harijans and Hindu-Muslim friendship remained beautiful dreams. Had religious considerations been separated from politics, India's problems would have been easy of solution; this separation was never made, though it was the goal of Gandhiji and all Gandhians and became the axiom of Congress policy. The Congress party made 'secularism' a fundamental of policy, not because it minimized the importance of religion, but because it wanted to exorcise that religious separatism which permeated economic, social and political life and which prevented patriotic solidarity. It was in a religious spirit that Gandhiji felt at one with the many communities of the country: "I cannot find Him (God) apart from humanity. . . . I claim I know my millions. All the hours of the day I am with them. They are my first care and my last because I recognize no God except that God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions."¹

This religious spirit did not tone down his sense of self-respect. To Mr. G. Slocombe who had repeated the rumour that in former years, Gandhiji had prostrated himself before the Prince of Wales, he answered: "Well, Mr. Slocombe, this does not even do credit to your imagination. I would bend the knee before the poorest untouchable in India for having participated in crushing him for centuries, I would take the dust off his feet. But I would not prostrate myself, not even before the King, much less before the Prince of Wales for the reason that he represents insolent might".²

It was in this spirit that he visualized the problem of political equality for Harijans. The Round Table Confer-

¹ L. Fischer, *op. cit.* p. 330.

² L. Fischer, *op. cit.* p. 306.

ence (1931) had failed and Gandhiji after the Dandi Salt March had been jailed in Yeravda when he heard there was a proposal of separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims and also for untouchables. He hastened to inform Sir Samuel Hoare (11-3-32) that "separate electorate for the Depressed Classes is harmful for them and for Hinduism. . . . So far as Hinduism is concerned, separate electorates would simply vivisect and disrupt it. . . . The political aspect, important though it is, dwindles into insignificance compared to the moral and religious issue". If the Government decided to have separate electorates for untouchables, "I must fast to death. . . . The contemplated step is not a method, it is a part of my being". On August 17, 1932, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald announced the Cabinet decision. The Depressed classes would remain part of the Hindu community, but for twenty years, they would have a double vote, one on the Hindu electorate, and another on a special constituency. Gandhiji answered on the 9th of September: "This matter is one of pure religion. . . . What I am against is their statutory separation from the Hindu fold as long as they choose to belong to it". He had fasted for Hindu-Muslim unity, he would fast for Hindu-Harijan unity,

The fast began on September 20th. He had heard "the Voice of God, of Truth, of Conscience," or the Inner Voice, or the 'still small voice', (as he said after his later fast of May 1933 for the Harijans). The fast was not intended to coerce Government, he protested later on. It was directly meant to convert the Hindus; "If the Hindu mass-mind is not yet prepared to banish untouchability root and branch, it must sacrifice me without the slightest hesitation". The intention was to stir the Hindus to action. . . . That it went beyond the intention and coerced some people into giving a decision against their conviction was unfortunate. . . . The fact is that all spiritual fasts always influence those who come within the zone of their influence. That is why spiritual fasting is described as *tapas*. And all *tapas* exerts puri-

fyng influence on those in whose behalf it is undertaken" (*Harijan*, 9-9-1933).

Whatever may have been the intention and forecast of Gandhiji, the agitation throughout the country soon rose to fever pitch, and politicians, convinced or coerced, hurriedly sought a solution; Yeravda jail became the key-point of the Empire's life. On September 19, Gandhiji told a deputation that he was reconciled to reserved seats for Harijans. But Dr. Ambedkar objected that this system would hamper Harijan representatives to denounce and terminate caste oppression. Parleys went on day and night. A compromise was effected: the number of seats reserved for Harijans was fixed at 147 (Dr. Ambedkar wanted 197, Mr. R. MacDonald 71), but the separate primaries would be abolished in course of time. It was the Yeravda Pact. The British Cabinet accepted it, Gandhiji was released, and the country came back to a relative quiet.

Some sort of political emancipation for Harijans had been secured. Gandhiji went on his restless campaign to secure as well social, and religious emancipation. Hence his ceaseless urge by word or example for fraternization with Harijans, interdining, intermarriages, and temple-entry. The obstacles were numberless, the successes many, but it would be unduly long to recount them in detail. Yet in his last days he could not claim he had obtained the heart-conversion of caste Hindus and the full emancipation for the Harijans. His great dream had been the unity of India and Indians; "In fighting this battle against untouchability, I am fighting for unity not only among Hindu 'touchables' and Hindu 'untouchables', but among Hindus, Muslims, Christians and all other different religious communities. Do not for one moment believe that I am interested in the numerical strength of the Hindus. I have never, throughout my life, laid stress upon quantity. I have ever insisted upon quality at the sacrifice of quantity. . . . This great Hindu religion itself will perish in spite of its so-called millions of followers, if its votaries persist in harbouring the evil of

untouchability. Not because untouchables can be counted by the millions. It would perish even if they were a handful. Milk is poisoned and has to be thrown away whether you put little or much arsenic in it" (*Harijan*, 17-11-1933). Who could pretend that in 1952 the arsenic has vanished away?

A. Lallemand.



Harijans at School

By the Constitution, India has been established as a Sovereign Democratic Republic in which all persons shall be equal before the law. In the chapter on Fundamental Rights successive sections urge different aspects of this equality: equality of right, equality of opportunity, exclusion of discrimination on grounds of class or caste, abolition of untouchability, freedom of religion, etc. Most careful have the framers of the Constitution been in prescribing the democratic framework on which the new India must rest, and in avoiding any suggestion of privilege, immunity, or exemption. At the same time, all Governments have a duty which they cannot abdicate: the protection of the weak—and this protection is all the more necessary in a democratic set-up where the struggle for power brings to the forefront the influential and wealthy groups and the weaker elements may very well go to the wall. All parties in power today pretend, at least, to hold out a succouring hand to the weak; often it is mere self-interest, for it may be the lot of the pigmy one day to overthrow the giant; occasionally it is a device to divert attention, for a close scrutiny may uncover too many skeletons; sometimes, however, it is recognized as a fundamental purpose of Government, for only so can every element in the State contribute to the well-being of the whole.

In India where inequalities born of religion and social status are very apt to prejudice the functioning of a democratic republic, the framers of the Constitution have, from the very outset, prescribed the forms in which this help to the weaker elements will be extended. Absence of discrimination there may be, but Art. 15(3) reserves to the State the right to make "special provision for women and children". Equality of opportunity is the general rule, but according to Art. 16(4) "nothing shall prevent the State from making provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens". Arts. 29 and 30 reserve to minorities the right of preserving their own culture and managing their own educational institutions. Art. 46 states: "The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation". Part XVI of the Constitution deals with special Provisions for certain classes. Art. 330 prescribes the reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes; appointments may also be reserved for members of these classes according to Art. 335. Art. 338 demands the appointment of a Special Officer to "investigate matters relating to the safeguards provided by the Constitution"; and it is explicitly stated that "references to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes shall be construed as including references to such other backward classes as the President may by order specify [Art. 338(3)]. Finally, by Art. 340, the President is empowered to appoint Commissions to investigate "the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes" and "to make recommendations as to the steps to be taken to remove their difficulties and improve their condition."

Help for Backward Classes

Three points in this programme are worthy of notice :

1. All privilege is "in favour of any backward class

of citizens". There is no hint or suggestion as to religious affiliations; that a class of citizens is backward is enough reason for it to deserve the helping hand of the State. Any other line of distinction would be incompatible with the profession of a secular state.

2. Seats are to be reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes; but since Christians have surrendered the right to reserved seats, a distinction must be drawn between Christian members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and members of the same Castes and Tribes belonging to any other religious affiliation; the former have forfeited their right to reservation of seats, the latter retain them.

3. But while Christian members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes no longer have any claim to reserved seats, they still retain their right to any other assistance assured by the State, to the reservation of appointments and posts if they are not adequately represented in the services under the State, to the special care of their educational and economic interests, to protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation, etc. Mere conversion to Christianity does not alter their social status overnight; they still remain members of the backward classes, and still have the right to the assistance assured by the State to the under-privileged. Nor would it be correct to assume that such assistance is to be limited to members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; for them seats are reserved, but assistance in the shape of reservation of appointments, educational concessions, and protection from exploitation is offered to all "socially and educationally backward classes".

That these conclusions from the articles of the Constitution are legitimate may be seen from the recommendations of the Divakar Committee of 1950, based on the principle that "communalism has worked against the country's interest and has stood in the way of national consolidation". The Committee emphasised that certain ameliorative measures, not based on the principle of castes and communities, should be taken to help those people who are backward

socially and economically, and special opportunities should be given to them in regard to educational and cultural uplift. On the one hand, the Committee recommends that caste and community should not be considered in relation to appointments for the Public Services, for admission to schools and colleges, in records of Courts, Police, Hospitals, Jails; on the other hand, it advises that the States should cast their net very wide when drawing up their lists of backward classes, and insists on educational concessions in favour of these backward classes, including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Who Constitute the Scheduled Castes

In accordance with Art. 341 of the Constitution, the President of the Republic, on 10th August, 1950, after the requisite consultation with the Governors and Rajpramukhs, published a list of the Scheduled Castes. In the course of this G.O. which was entitled "The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950" there appeared the following clause: "No person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste". Inevitably, such an ambiguous clause could only give rise to the gravest misgivings. What was the meaning of the President's Order? Did it mean that only Hindu members of the Scheduled Castes were entitled to reservation of seats? Or did it imply, as the statement on the face of it suggests, that the decision of the President was to confine state aid and facilities only to those Scheduled Caste members who have declared themselves as professing the Hindu religion? Enquiries, deputations, and protests reached the Central Government, and the result was two reassuring messages, one from the President of India, the other from the Prime Minister. In his letter dated 17-12-50, the President stated: "I should however state at once that as far as educational and economic facilities to Backward Classes are concerned, it is not the intention of the Government of India that there should be any difference on grounds of religion and caste.

The only differentiation between the Backward Classes and other Backward groups who are called Scheduled Castes can be in regard to certain political rights such as separate representation". And Pandit Nehru: "The enumeration of the Scheduled Castes among Hindus is mainly for the purpose of reserving seats for their representatives in Parliament and the State Legislatures. It has nothing to do with aid and facilities. Articles 16 (4), 46 and 340 (1) of the Constitution make it very clear that all state aid and facilities are to be given not only to members of the Hindu Scheduled castes, but also equally to all other educationally and socially backward classes, whether they profess Hinduism, Christianity, or any other religion. Only in matters of reservation of seats no person who professes a religion other than Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of the Scheduled Castes, and accordingly no Indian Christian can be regarded as belonging to a Scheduled Caste for the purposes of the Constitution".

The interpretation given above of the backward classes and the special assistance to be granted to them by the state, has therefore been confirmed both by the President and the Prime Minister. While only Hindu members of the Scheduled Castes are entitled to reservation of seats, all the members of the Backward Classes, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and others, whatever religion they profess, are entitled to educational concessions and economic aid.

Response of the States in 1951

The letter of the President of India was dated 17th December 1950. The assurance was given that the States would be informed accordingly, and one may at least presume that the necessary information was sent to them early in the new year. Since that time 12 months have passed and we are now in a position to assess the response of the States in 1951. Our survey is limited to Catholic members of the backward

classes, whether Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and others, and the help that has been extended to them.

Let us first take the States where aid had been given.

Mysore

This appears to be the State where the least discrimination between Catholics and Hindus is maintained. The Scheduled Castes and Harijan Catholics do get full concessions, though the proviso is made that the House subsidies earmarked by the Government of Mysore each year in their rural development scheme for the upkeep of depressed classes, are not given to Christians. (It must be noted that such part of the Diocese of Mysore as does not fall within the State of Mysore gets different treatment: Hill Tribes such as Badagas, Gowdas, Kothaires, etc., in the Nilgiris enjoy full-fee concession when Hindus, but only half-fee concession when Christians; the same counts for Christians belonging to the Non-Scheduled backward castes as Azaris, Agamadiars and others.)

Bihar

In this State, a distinction must be drawn between Catholics of the Scheduled Castes (of whom there are comparatively few), and Catholics of the Scheduled Tribes (Aboriginals). The latter, most of whom are in Chotanagpur, are more generously treated, and receive aid both from Central and from State funds; as in Mysore, so also in Bihar, this help was being given before the President of India took action under Art. 341 of the Constitution.

These are the latest figures from Chotanagpur (Diocese of Ranchi):

Aid from Central Government

(a) In 1950-51, the Central Government gave 29 scholarships to St. Xavier's College, Ranchi, for Aboriginals; of them 24 went to Christians, 5 to non-Christians.

(b) In 1951-52, the Central Government gave St. Xavier's College 58 scholarships for Aborigines; of these 45 went to Christians. It must not be forgotten that St. Xavier's College, Ranchi, the number of Christian Aborigines (Scheduled Tribes) exceeds that of non-Christian Aborigines.

Aid from the Bihar Government

(a) In 1950-51, the Bihar Government gave 13 scholarships to aborigines, of which 4 went to Christians.

(b) In 1951-52 the Bihar Government gave 35 scholarships to Aborigines, in St. Xavier's, Ranchi, and of these 30 went to Christians.

(c) In 1951, the Government of Bihar, through the Welfare Dept., gave the Catholic Mission Rs. 4,440 in the first instance as scholarships for Christian boys and girls; and followed it up with another grant of Rs. 38,784 for scholarships for Aboriginal Christians, boys and girls. Besides these grants, there were 6 stipends of Rs. 20 p.m. for St. Anne's Weaving School, Ranchi.

(At the same time it is necessary to state that the Grant-in-aid of Rs. 22,340 a year for the Catholic schools in the Chotanagpur area has not been received since 1949; information has reached us that this is due less to set purpose than to bungling in the Educational Department of the State.)

In North Bihar, where Catholic members of the Scheduled Tribes are few, but where Catholic members of the Scheduled Castes are increasing in numbers, the situation is not favourable, as the following incident will show. At Bar Bigha, while the Catholic school was still in the elementary stage, the Catholic Chamar boys had to be sent to Std. VI and VII of the local school. The headmaster, a Hindu, gave five of these Catholic boys scholarships as he found them deserving in every respect. When the Inspector came later from Bhagalpur, he found fault with the headmaster for granting aid to Christian Chamars. The Headmaster defended

himself on the ground that whereas the social condition of the Christian boys had not altered by reason of their conversion, they deserved the scholarships on account of proficiency. The Inspector overruled the headmaster and the scholarships were awarded to Hindu Chamar boys only. Now this incident must be regarded in its proper prospective: one swallow does not make a summer, and one Inspector does not decide the fate of hundreds of Christian Chamar boys in North Bihar: but this was the first time an attempt had been made by the Catholics of North Bihar to receive the aid assured to Christian members of the Scheduled Castes by the Constitution, and the attempt failed, not because the boys were not poor and not proficient in their studies, but purely and solely because they were Christians.

Orissa

The same situation prevails as in Bihar: Christian members of the Scheduled Tribes receive educational concessions and scholarships, as they were in the habit of receiving before the Constitution came into force, but the Christian members of the Scheduled Castes have been left out in the cold. His Lordship, the Bishop of Cuttack, called on the Hon'ble the Chief Minister of Orissa to represent the matter; he was informed that the Government of Orissa was aware of the decision of the President and was studying the question. There, as far as our information goes, the matter rests. Without lack of respect, one may ask why so many months are required to study a question which on the face of it is quite clear; since the number of Catholics in Orissa, unlike in Bihar, is small, even the financial implications cannot impose a strain on the State's budget.

U.S. of Travancore and Cochin

Help to Christian Harijans at school is only one part of a complex educational question which might have been solved in the early stages, but was allowed to develop into a festering sore till it embroiled the relations between the

State Government and the Christians. It is alleged, rightly or wrongly, that the background of the trouble was the conception on the part of the Government of a Secular State as one in which there is no place for the denominational school, and all education is the monopoly of the State. Such a concept, except under a dictatorship, must be a fertile breeding-ground of trouble in any state ; but in the U.S. of Travancore-Cochin where Catholics were ahead long ago in the field of education and where the Catholic contribution represents a considerable portion of voluntary effort, the result was disastrous. That this estimate is not exaggerated may be judged from the fact that the President of the Congress and the present Governor of Bengal visited the State more than 18 months ago, with the purpose of pouring oil on troubled waters, at least if reports in the press are to be trusted ; and the press also reported the directions forwarded to the State Government by the States Ministry at Delhi.

The immediate cause of the imbroglio was the Panampally Scheme, according to which private schools had to surrender 80% of their fee income to the Government treasury, from which the salaries of teachers would be met, and were forbidden to appoint teachers except from a list prepared by the Public Services Commission of the State. Inasmuch as this was a flagrant violation of the rights of minorities (Christians) to administer their own institutions, the Scheme was in conflict with the provisions of the Constitution, and, as was to be expected, aroused a storm of protest. Having taken up a stand that was untenable in law, whatever other justification might have been alleged in its defence, the State Government persisted in its policy, from reasons of prestige presumably, and ignored the advice of influential parties, more capable of taking a sane and balanced view of the situation. The result could be clearly foreseen : relations between the Government and the Catholic community were embroiled, suspicions were aroused, and accusations of an anti-christian animus began to be levelled against the Government. When the Panampally Scheme

was finally jettisoned, the time for a graceful surrender had passed, and the legacy of bitterness alone remained. Nor was the Panampally Scheme the only charge against the State Government; there was the unfortunate refusal on the part of the Education Department to recognise new Catholic Schools, the covert attempts to start opposition schools, and the foisting on Catholic managements of textbooks repulsive to Catholic sentiment.

Under such circumstances, it is to be expected that the claims of Catholic members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes to educational concessions would receive scant attention; and so it was proved. These are the conditions under which the educational concessions and grants are made in the U.S. of Travancore-Cochin:

1. All Hindu students of Middle and High School stages, coming under the said categories, are entitled to full-fee concession (Tuition Fees as well as Special Fees for Games, Library, etc.). They are also entitled to a lump grant of Rs. 25 per annum in the case of Middle School students and Rs. 40 per annum in the case of High School students, towards the cost of books, clothes, etc. A mere application from the Headmaster is sufficient. Failure for one year does not debar a student from obtaining this concession.

2. Catholic students in the said categories receive either full concession or half-concession of fees. They receive no lump grant; and they have to produce two certificates, one of identity to prove that they originally belonged to the said caste or tribe, and the other to prove that the income of the parent or guardian does not exceed Rs. 900. Applications have to be made at the inception of the Middle School stage and again at the inception of the High School. Any failure results in the cessation of all concessions.

3. In regard to colleges, the situation is no different. In the beginning of the academic year 1950, the State Government announced that Christian students who were converts from the Harijan community would be eligible for the same

assistance as was given to Hindu Harijan students. Actually, such Christian students receive the equivalent of tuition fees, about Rs. 112 per annum, whereas Hindu Harijan students receive full educational assistance including boarding fees, over Rs. 700 per annum. Whereas there are more than 300 Hindu Harijans in the colleges of Malabar, the number of Christian Harijans in the same colleges is very small.

Comments on these facts and figures may be deemed superfluous; the contrast and the discrimination are too obvious to need underlining. In the face of this, one may very well ask whether a State Government whose publicity department frequently regales the Indian public with tales of the measures which have been taken for the amelioration of Christian Harijans, can acquit itself entirely of an anti-Christian animus. And the question becomes yet more pertinent if the latest orders in respect of Christian Harijans reconverted to Hinduism be taken into consideration.

Dec. 11, 1951.

P. 2121

TRAVANCORE-COCHIN GAZETTE

PROCEEDINGS

Co-operation Section

Sub.—Ameliorative Measures to Reconverts to Hinduism from among Backward Class Christians.—grant of

Read again.—G.P.D. Dis. 10317/50/DD. dated 31-8-51

(2) G.P. C3—11748/51/DD dated 30-10-51

Order D. Dis. 10432/51/DD, dated 1-12-51.

According to the orders issued in G.P.D. Dis. 10317/50/DD., dated 31-8-51 (read as 1st paper above) reconverts to Hinduism from among Christian Converts are eligible for full fee concession (in schools) or grants equal to tuition fees (in Colleges) as the case may be. On further examination of the question, Government consider that reconverts should be eligible for the same concessions as they were eligible for before their conversion to Christianity. Accordingly, it is ordered that persons who belonged originally to Hindu Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and were subsequently converted to Christianity should on reconversion to Hinduism be eligible for all educational concessions granted to Hindu Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

2. They will also be eligible for the other concessions in respect of grant of land, establishment of colonies, etc., for which Hindu Scheduled Castes and Hindu Scheduled Tribes are eligible.

3. The orders already issued are revised accordingly.

The discrimination between Christian and Hindu Harijans stands self-confessed.

Madras

To evade the obligation of granting full assistance to Christian Harijans, a clever device has been adopted in the State of Madras. By an announcement in the Fort St. George Gazette, certain classes have been declared to be "socially and educationally backward classes of citizens within the meaning and for the purpose of Art. 16(4) of the Constitution": among the classes thus distinguished are "converts to Christianity from the Scheduled Castes". Thus Christian Harijans are taken out of the Scheduled Classes to which they properly belong, and placed in another class, enjoying fewer privileges and rights. The Madras Government endeavours in this manner to save its face and to evade its obligations: on the one hand, it can argue plausibly that the Christian Harijans are receiving help as belonging to the Backward Classes; on the other hand it can still deny to Christian Harijans the aid due to them as members of the Scheduled Classes. It is not surprising therefore that that in the Madras State, Catholic pupils of the Scheduled Classes receive only half-fee concessions, while Hindu pupils of the same classes receive full-fee concessions. Even this half-fee concession is not universal in the State, as many applications for reduction are just rejected, without any reason being assigned for the refusal. For the other half of the fees, Catholic Harijans are asked to refer to the Harijan Welfare Association, but the appeal is in most cases infructuous, as the Harijan Welfare Association lacks funds for the purpose. The State Government can thus point to a machinery by which Catholic Harijans are treated on the same level as Hindu Harijans; and the machinery does not work for lack of the necessary material to make it work. If the State Government can find the money for the education of the Hindu Harijans, why it may be asked is the money not available for the education of the Catholic Harijans?

Or again, help is promised by the Harijan Welfare Association, if application is made on the requisite forms, and when forms are asked for, the reply is received that they are not in stock.

Nor is this all. Catholic Harijan pupils are granted the half-fee concession, on condition that the pupil himself or his father has been converted to Christianity; and a certificate to this effect has to be produced from an officer of the Revenue Department. Should the conversion have taken place higher up in the family tree, the concession is refused—the implication being that within two generations, the Catholic Harijan ceases to be a member of the Scheduled Classes, a purely gratuitous assumption which finds warrant neither in the Constitution nor in fact. For a member of the Harijan class, to obtain a certificate from an officer of the Revenue Department is no easy matter, as anyone acquainted with the ways of the bureaucracy in India will surmise: so that the Catholic Harijan is often deprived of the concession due to him. Why, again it may be asked, should a certificate be required from the Catholic Harijan pupil which is not demanded from his Hindu brother?

It will therefore be seen that conditions in the Madras State are no whit better than those obtaining in Malabar; and as the number of Catholic Harijans in the Madras State is considerable, the hardships they are subjected to are all the greater. So far as these hardships are part of their social condition, they might be tolerated; but when the ameliorative measures offered in the Constitution are denied to them merely on the ground of the religion they profess, one is entitled to ask how such obvious differentiation can find a place in a secular state, where before the law all are equal.

Bombay

In the State of Bombay another measure has been devised, perhaps without the precise object of depriving Catholic Harijans of the aid due to them, but nevertheless with that effect. It has been officially stated that only those cate-

gories of the Backward Classes which have been listed by the Government of Bombay for purposes of recruitment to the services, will be considered for other concessions, educational and economic. As Catholics in the state generally are not included among the Backward Classes, Catholic members of the Scheduled Classes are deprived of help. Now this again is a purely arbitrary procedure ; while Art. 16(4) of the Constitution is taken into consideration, Art. 46 is completely ignored. Art. 16(4) gives the state the right to reserve posts in the services for the Backward Classes ; but Art. 46 imposes on the state the duty of "promoting with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes". Notwithstanding their conversion, there are Catholics in the state of Bombay belonging to the Scheduled Castes, and their educational interests are ignored. This neglect on the part of the Government of Bombay has been drawn attention to by His Grace the Archbishop of Bombay, but without effect.

Of the other states little need be said. In Rajasthan the number of Christians from the Scheduled Castes is as yet small. In Uttar Pradesh little help has so far been forthcoming ; but the question is likely in time to become a very live one. From Madhya Pradesh and Madhya Bharat sufficient information has not been received. In West Bengal, Catholic Harijans are few. It is in the states where Catholic Harijans are numerous, chiefly in South India, that the discriminating policy of the State Governments works the greatest hardships. It has been repeatedly pointed out that a change of religion does not imply a change in social and economic status ; poor the Harijan has been before his conversion to Christianity and poor he remains. By becoming a Christian he loses the right to reserved seats in Parliament for he shares with the Catholic body the sacrifice which has been made with the set purpose of destroying the pernicious habit, whereby political alignments were dictated by religious affiliations, and of knitting the Indian nation more closely together. Is it fair that he should in addition

be penalised for his religion, by being deprived of the aid provided by the Constitution for the underprivileged class to which he belongs by birth ? That he is being penalised in most States of the country, purely and solely because of his religion, has been abundantly proved in the foregoing pages.

Conclusion

This survey of Catholic Harijans at School in 1951 has been made, not with any desire of throwing reckless charges at the State Governments, but of drawing attention to a grave injustice to the Catholic community, which has about a million Harijans within its fold, for whose education and uplift the community is responsible. Such a task is above the capacity of the Catholic body, with its slender resources; on the other hand, the Catholic body has the right to look to the State for help in accomplishing its task, since the State by its Constitution has guaranteed such aid. The directives from the Central Government have been abundantly clear : it lies with the individual States to carry out those directives. If India is to be recognised by the whole nation as a secular state, there must be no differentiation or discrimination on the grounds of religion, and by their refusal to implement the directives of the Centre, the State Governments have laid themselves open to the charge of differentiation and discrimination. If this survey, neither complete nor exhaustive, has the effect of calling the attention of the Indian public to a grave injustice, it will have fulfilled its purpose ; twelve months have passed since the President's order was communicated to the State Governments, and it is our earnest hope that wiser counsels will prevail in the year that has just begun.

✠ L. RAYMOND,
Actg. Dir. Educat. Section,
Catholic Bishops Conference of India.

"Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me." MAT. xxv, 40.

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Ready Shortly

Too Many of Us?

by

A. NEVETT

A Book on the Burning Questions of the Day:

BIRTH PREVENTION

INDIAN POPULATION TRENDS

MARRIAGE PROBLEMS

FOOD SITUATION

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Etc.

Etc.

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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL ORDER

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- (1) To spread the social teachings of the Catholic Church.
- (2) To provide theoretical and practical training for social workers.
- (3) To serve as a centre of information about Catholic social works.

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